

Chapter 3:

Vision for Newton NH

Newton Vision Chapter

The Town of Newton is primarily a residential community that would like to encourage land uses such as agriculture, single-family homes, local businesses, and the conservation and protection of natural resources. The Town of Newton seeks to preserve our rural character, our natural, historical and cultural resources, while providing municipal and commercial services, recreational facilities and housing options that support the needs of the community in a fiscally, socially and environmentally sustainable manner.

This vision statement was first formulated in 2006, informed by a survey of town residents. In 2021, a new survey was conducted by the Rockingham Planning Commission for the Newton Planning Board with 407 respondents, a high level of participation with comments and observations. The entire survey is appended to the Master Plan. The results are very similar to the past surveys done in Newton in 1986, 1999 and 2006, affirming the vision statement above.

According to RSA 674:2 II(a), the master plan shall include a vision section that “serves to direct the other

sections of the plan. This section shall contain a set of statements that articulate the desires of the citizens affected by the master plan, not only for their locality but also for the region and the whole state. It shall contain a set of guiding principles and priorities to implement that vision.”

Goals.

Based on the Survey results, the following goals for Newton’s Master Plan are set forward by the Planning Board:

Goal 1. Preserve and protect Newton’s water and other natural resources.

Dominant as a priority by 92% of the Master Plan Survey respondents is preserving clean private well water, with 88% noting the importance of natural water resources. After water resources, other natural resources like tree-lined roads, forests and farmlands, dark night sky and habitats for wild animals are cited by a majority as very important to the character of Newton.

Specific Recommendations for Goal 1:

1. Monitor and chart drought conditions.
2. Provide annual town financial and logistical support for the Country Pond Lake Association and NH Lake Host Program.

3. Establish new land conservation goals and strategy within one year.
4. Create a 5-year land management plan for all public lands to maintain and improve the health of the existing ecosystem, biodiversity, connectivity and pollinator habitats.
5. Execute a formal review of zoning regulations in order to protect Newton's water and other natural resources. This should include an examination of the regulations of other rural communities, increases to residential lot size allowances, and incentives to developers to preserve tree cover, ecosystems, and natural buffer zones over the next two years.
6. Institute and enforce strict repercussions for zoning ordinance violations.

Goal 2. Pursue tax base development that preserves rural character or existing residential development areas.

Reasonable commercial and industrial development within existing zoning ordinances is highly important to Survey respondents as a means to restrain property tax growth.

Tax growth restraint is a common theme in similar rural communities throughout New Hampshire.

Specific recommendations for Goal 2:

Form Newton Chamber of Commerce to encompass local businesses within 2 years.

The Chamber can coordinate traffic, demand studies, work with the State on planning, and work with the Board of Selectmen and voters on tax incentives to induce business establishments. Funding to be explored from grants and taxpayer support.

Establish a Village District subcommittee within two years. This will sit within the Chamber of Commerce and focus on ways to encourage development in the Village District area.

Goal 3. Address deferred maintenance of Newton's Infrastructure, including town buildings and highways.

Comments from the Town Government portion of the survey described unaddressed needs at the Town Hall and the Library, as well as deferred road maintenance; the result of a budget that has not increased in 13 years.

Town building maintenance is being planned and budgeted in 2021.

Specific Recommendations for Goal 3.

1. Establish a Town Committee in year one to plan 5-year Capital Improvement Plan, recommend

annual budget allocations, and seek grants to support town building and highway maintenance, and establish reserves.

2. Explore expansion of impact fees to support the town's capital needs.

Goal 4. Simplify and clarify the zoning regulations and application process.

Many survey respondents express the need for improved communication of zoning ordinances and procedures.

Specific Recommendations for Goal 4

1. Institute a Planning Board review and amendment of applications within one year.
2. Approve and publish on the town website the Master Plan revisions within one year. This includes the new Introduction, Vision Chapter and Survey.
3. Establish a standing Master Plan Steering Committee for ongoing Master Plan reviews and updates.

Goal 5. Improve enforcement of existing town regulations.

Many Survey respondents comment with concern and frustration over common violations of existing town

regulations, such as junk yards, unregistered vehicles, non-compliance with Planning Board conditional approvals, speeding and littering.

Specific Recommendations for Goal 5

1. Expand funding for more hours and/or support for code enforcement.
2. Add one-year reinspection condition on all approvals.

MASTER PLAN SURVEY – 2021 SUMMARY REPORT FROM ROCKINGHAM PLANNING COMMISSION*

Full Survey found in Appendix

Results

Between April 16, 2021 and May 17, 2021 a total of 407 individuals took the survey and provided 26,125 responses or comments to the survey questions. The survey was a predominantly online survey with links posted on the Town website, information within an article on the Carriage Towne News, posted on the unofficial Newton community Facebook pages, announcements at multiple municipal board meetings, flyers handed out at the Transfer Station, and on flyers posted around Newton. Paper surveys were made available at the Newton Town Hall and Public Library. (However, no paper surveys with responses were received.) This survey is neither statistically nor scientifically valid, however, it does represent the most comprehensive insight into the needs and wants of Newton since the 2006 Master Plan Survey which had a total of only 66 participants. This survey will serve as one of many sources used in the current Master Plan update; other sources may include public meetings, census data, and other resources.

The survey was intended primarily for residents, however, individuals who own property or a business in Newton

were also invited to provide their thoughts. Of the responses received, no individual taking the survey lives outside of Newton and only nine participants owned a business in Newton. Over half of survey participants (57%) have lived in Newton for more than 10 years, just under half of participants were over the age of 55 (45%), and 63% work full time.

The full survey results are available at <https://publicinput.com/Newton2021> and on the Newton Planning Board website at <https://www.newton-nh.gov/newton-nh-planning-board>.

Next Steps

The Newton Planning Board is working on drafting updates to the Vision Chapter of the Master Plan and then working on a more routine basis of updating additional chapters. **Any updates to the Newton Master Plan will require a public hearing prior to Planning Board adoption in accordance with RSA 674:1-4.**

The Newton Master Plan Survey was developed by the Newton Master Plan Steering Committee, a subcommittee of the Newton Planning Board, with assistance from Rockingham Planning Commission.

Summary of Findings

The following outline some of the major survey findings. The survey itself was published to assist the Newton Planning Board in updating the Master Plan, however, some questions were also included to assist other municipal boards, services, and functions. Many of the items asked about in this survey are the same as previous Newton surveys published in 1984, 1998 and 2006 to allow for tracking changes in priorities and concerns over time.

Several major themes emerged from survey responses:

- Most residents want to maintain Newton's rural character, but many expressed a desire to encourage commercial development that had low impacts on residents and natural resources. The implications on the tax rate from different types of development (single-family, 55+ facilities, and commercial development) was also a large concern.
- Many are concerned about protecting Newton's natural resources, particularly water resources and open spaces, and

potential negative side effects

We need to work to reduce the tax burden on homeowners. Clean industry would be a good add. Unique boutiques and cafes would lure tourist in. If taxes don't reduce, retired people won't be able to live here. I've seen the increased traffic on Rt 108. It is ideal for businesses that cater to tourists without taking away from the character of Newton." "

from certain types of businesses. Services provided by the Town are generally highly regarded, but costs and impacts on tax rates was a strong concern.

The major themes are consistent with previous survey findings, however, there was an increase in concern about commercial development impacts on existing residential areas.

What Do You Like Best About Living in Newton?

Top three answers:

- 80% Like the rural atmosphere.
- 49% Like the natural features.

"I love the small-town atmosphere, you know your neighbors, you know the town officials, and dumpday is more of a community day than it is an effort. "

- 43% Like that it is near main highways.

What Features are Important to Newton's Character?

Many features of Newton showed strong preferences among residents:

- 81% thought locally owned business were important or very important.
- 88% felt it is important to keep commercial uses in the currently allowed zoning districts. Seventy-nine percent (79%) indicated it was important to increase separation between commercial/industrial uses and residential uses.
- 94% of residents indicated that maintaining open spaces, natural areas, and working farms are important or very important.
- 99% felt that healthy water resources were important or very important.

What Features should the Town pursue more of?

There were some areas where residents had diverse opinions about what Newton needs more of:

- There was a mix of the types of commercial property uses that were more desired in Newton, but generally low impact businesses/industry or services (such as restaurants) were preferred.

- For future housing options, more

“While remaining rural is a key to my vision of the future of Newton this town must bring businesses into offset property tax. Newton needs growth in more than just housing in order to keep up with changing times.”

residents preferred single family and generally did not want more multifamily or manufactured housing.

- Amenities such as open spaces, trails, farmers' markets, bike paths and recreation facilities were overall desired by most residents.

Cost of Town Services

From participant comments received throughout the survey property taxes (both town and school portions) are a major concern for residents. The survey focused on the cost for town services specifically as it is more related to land use planning activities. However, the survey results indicate tax rate impacts are a major influence about future decisions for Newton.